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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 05/27/08

INDEX:

- (1) Report of existence of more Japanese abductees in North Korea:
Possibly reflecting improving U.S.-DPRK relations (Mainichi)
- (2) DPRK conveys to U.S. on Japanese abductees: "Several abductees
are alive and are ready to return home" (Mainichi)
- (3) Scope column: Ruling coalition alarmed that new health insurance
system for elderly will become major campaign issue for Okinawa
prefectural assembly election (Tokyo Shimbun)
- (4) U.S. government approves Japan's shipment of imported rice to
Philippines (Asahi)
- (5) DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama: Futenma should be relocated to
Guam (Ryukyu Shimpo)
- (6) Guide to choices in run-up to next general election: U.S.
military bases and livelihood (Mainichi)
- (7) Stop cluster bombs - Voices of world and Japan (Conclusion):
Interview with Hidenao Nakagawa, former secretary general of ruling
Liberal Democratic Party: Prevent damage by adopting alternatives
(Mainichi)
- (8) U.S. closely watching Japan's preparedness as its ally
(Mainichi)

ARTICLES:

(1) Report of existence of more Japanese abductees in North Korea:
Possibly reflecting improving U.S.-DPRK relations

MAINICHI (Internet edition) (Full)
May 27, 2008

(Asked about a report of North Korea admitting that several more Japanese abductees existed,) a senior government official stated this morning: "I don't know anything about it. If North Korea has informed the United States about such, the U.S. should tell Japan about it. On the other hand, there are (abducted victims) whose whereabouts the police have not been grasp. If they are allowed to return home, that would be progress (in Japan-DPRK relations)." The official expressed a desire to respond positively if North Korea were to let the abductees return home.

On the North Korea issue, the government has taken the position that abductions and the missile issue are to be resolved comprehensively, and it has been seeking a parallel resolution linked to reciprocity. As the feeling grows that removal of North Korea from the U.S.' terrorist-sponsoring list is becoming a reality, there is a growing mood in the government that progress in the abduction issue may come, too.

Foreign Minister Koumura stressed to the press in this morning's news conference: "The Japanese government is making its own efforts, as well, for we would like to see progress in Japanese-North Korean relations centered on the abduction issue." There is a possibility that the government in its secret negotiations may have picked up hints about the existence of new abducted victims.

TOKYO 00001447 002 OF 008

(2) DPRK conveys to U.S. on Japanese abductees: "Several abductees are alive and are ready to return home"

MAINICHI ONLINE NEWS (Full)
May 27, 2008, 15:00

In connection with the abduction issue, it was learned today from a source connected to the government that North Korea had conveyed to the United States that "there are still several Japanese abductees inside the country and we are prepared to send them home." Those abductees mentioned by North Korea seem to be different from the 12 persons recognized by the Japanese government as abductees whose whereabouts are unknown. By playing the diplomatic card of letting the abductees return home, Pyongyang apparently aims to give the U.S. the impression that there is progress on the abduction issue and then press it to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. Another motive seems to be to shake up Japan. However, whether this will actually lead to abductees returning home cannot be predicted.

Negotiating card intended to have Washington delist DPRK as state sponsor of terrorism

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, the U.S. chief negotiator in the six-party talks, is to be visiting Beijing from May 27 and meet with North Korea's chief negotiator Kim Kye Gwan there. The two officials are expected to discuss North Korea's planned declaration of its nuclear programs, the Japanese abduction issue, and also what to do about the JAL Yodo-go hijackers, who live in Pyongyang.

According to the government-connected source, information about the existence of another group of Japanese abductees was conveyed to the U.S. last fall. On the premise that all are alive, Tokyo has called on Pyongyang to have them all return home immediately. Last October, Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura in fact noted: "If all abductees who are alive return home, most of the abduction issue will be resolved. If some of them return home, that would mean progress."

As for the Yodo-go hijackers, Koumura noted: "I don't think there would be progress even if they return home."

So far, the government has recognized 17 abductees, including Megumi

Yokota (who went missing when she was 13). Of them, five abductees and their family members are back in Japan. Citing an apology by North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and the return home of five abductees, North Korea had insisted that "the abduction issue has been resolved," and that "all the abductees who are alive have returned home."

Meanwhile, the Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to the North Korea has registered some 470 Japanese as missing persons who may have been abducted by North Korea. In view of the situations under which they went missing, the commission says 36 of those missing Japanese are most likely to have been abducted by North Korea.

(3) Scope column: Ruling coalition alarmed that new health insurance system for elderly will become major campaign issue for Okinawa prefectural assembly election

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)

TOKYO 00001447 003 OF 008

May 24, 2008

A major cause for the sharp decline in the public support rates of the cabinet of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is public criticism of the new health insurance system for people aged 75 and older. The ruling parties are increasingly alarmed that the introduction of the new medical insurance system for the elderly will adversely affect the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly election on June 8. The official campaign for the election will kick off on May 30.

The fixed number of the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly members totals 48. Of the 48 seats, one seat is vacant, with 27 held by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and New Komeito, and 20 held by the opposition parties -- the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the Okinawa Social Mass Party. It is considered that the ruling camp led by Gov. Masahiro Nakaima will be certain to retain the majority of the prefectoral assembly. If the ruling camp fails to secure the majority, the result of the election will have a significant impact on the U.S. base issue in Okinawa.

A source connected to the LDP election process gave this severe outlook: "The main campaign focus will be on issue connected to social welfare and the daily lives of the people; it will not be on base issues. The new medical insurance system for the elderly has put the ruling camp at a disadvantage."

The ruling coalition was defeated in the Lower House by-election to fill the Yamaguchi No. 2 district seat because older voters distanced themselves from the ruling bloc. If the ruling camp is defeated also in the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly election, the opposition, which has called for abolishing the new health insurance system, will be certain to gain momentum. Should the row over the medical insurance system result in aggravating the issue of U.S. bases, which are the foundation of the Japan-U.S. alliance, the result could be serious for the government and ruling parties.

In an LDP board meeting on May 23, Election Strategy Council Chairman Makoto Koga instructed other senior party members to strive for perfection in support arrangements, saying: "The council will take the necessary response." The LDP has begun preparations to air in Okinawa TV commercials calling for understanding for the new medical system for the elderly. The party is also considering sending a statement it has readied that counters the DPJ's criticism of the new health insurance system. The LDP Okinawa chapter can use it for reference. New Komeito leader Akihiro Ota visited Okinawa to meet with Gov. Nakaima. The two agreed on the need to come up with measures to improve the application of the medical insurance system. Ota will call on May 24 at the offices of candidates on the New Komeito ticket to explain possible improvements to the system.

The opposition camp is giving priority to the Okinawa election, as well. DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama stated in a press conference: "If the opposition force tops the ruling bloc in the prefectoral assembly, there would be a major impact on national

politics."

Hatoyama visits Okinawa on May 24. Deputy President Naoto Kan will fly there next week.

(4) U.S. government approves Japan's shipment of imported rice to Philippines

TOKYO 00001447 004 OF 008

ASAHI (Page 2) (Full)
Evening, May 24

(Kaori Nishizaki, Washington)

The United States government on May 24 allowed Japan to ship rice imported from the U.S. to developing countries suffering from soaring food prices internationally and expressed hopes that the rice market will calm down.

Representatives from the Japanese and U.S. governments met in Washington on May 23. The U.S. side also expressed support for Japan's positive response to the Philippine government's request that Japan ship about 200,000 tons of imported rice to that nation.

In the 1993 Uruguay Round Agreement, Japan is required to import rice under the so-called minimum access formula. Of the about 770,000 tons of rice Japan imports annually under the minimum import obligation, about 50 PERCENT comes from the U.S. The U.S. government had insisted that the imported rice should be consumed within the nation, but the U.S. has now made a policy switch to approve Japan's shipment of such rice overseas only for humanitarian aid.

(5) DPJ Secretary General Hatoyama: Futenma should be relocated to Guam

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 2) (Full)
May 25, 2008

The major opposition Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama yesterday arrived in Okinawa. The aim of his trip to Okinawa was to lend his support to his party-backed candidates for the upcoming Okinawa Prefectural Assembly election. In an interview later in the day with Ryukyu Shimpo, Hatoyama touched on the question of relocating the U.S. Marines' Futenma Air Station, "I hope (the U.S. forces) will operate outside Japan as often as possible in peace time." Speaking of the DPJ's "Okinawa vision," which is under study for revisions, Hatoyama noted that the vision should clearly declare the need to relocate the airfield to anywhere else outside Japan as well as the prefecture. Hatoyama also showed his intention to seek to relocate the Futenma airfield to Guam, by noting, "(The Marines) are to be transferred to Guam. It is only natural for us to keep in mind Guam as a relocation site for the (Futenma) airfield."

Hatoyama articulated: "Ideally, I think it is better to relocate it anywhere else outside Japan. But this idea may not necessarily obtain the understanding of the United." Even in the case of pushing the relocation of the airfield to anywhere else inside the prefecture, Hatoyama implied that it would be necessary to set a timeframe in a clear-cut manner for the duration of the airfield, saying, "We must not allow the airfield to exist indefinitely."

Referring to the next Lower House election, Hatoyama mentioned the Okinawa 3rd Constituency, where the DPJ-backed candidate and the Social Democratic Party (SDP)-backed candidate will seek the same seat and stressed: "Mr. Ozawa's strategy is to field a promising candidate. If the other party's candidate is powerful enough, our party may join hands with that candidate. But if our party's candidate is promising, we will then seek the other party's

TOKYO 00001447 005 OF 008

cooperation. Our major aim is to beat the ruling Liberal Democratic

Party (LDP) and its junior coalition partner New Komeito." Regarding the Okinawa 4th Constituency, Hatoyama revealed that the DPJ would run a candidate on the premise that the candidate can beat the LDP-backed or the New Komeito-backed candidate, noting, "Generally speaking, it is likely that our party will have candidates-to-be vie with each other inside the party in order to choose the strongest one from among them." Speaking of the DPJ-backed candidate Denny Tamaki for the Okinawa 3rd Constituency and another DPJ-backed candidate Chobin Zukeran for the Okinawa 4th Constituency, Hatoyama said: "They should become candidates who can win."

Hatoyama, talking about the Prefectural Assembly election, stressed: "We want to reverse the positions of the ruling and opposition parties. We want to change prefectural administration and let that lead to a change in the national administration. In this sense, the Prefectural Assembly election is important." "It is fully possible that the results will affect the fate of the controversial medical system for the elderly," he added.

(6) Guide to choices in run-up to next general election: U.S. military bases and livelihood

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Full)
May 26, 2008

Differences in stances of Japan, U.S. appearing over transfer of 5th Air Force headquarters from Yokota to Guam

In December 2003, then United States Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Thomas B. Fargo briefed the top brass of the Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces and others about the planned realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. The Admiral said: "The U.S. plans to integrate the U.S. 5th Air Force headquarters (in Yokota) into the 13th Air Forces headquarters (in Guam)."

A senior ASDF officer retorted: "Recently, war tends to start with air warfare. An absence of our counterpart will really perplex us. All the more because Japan and the U.S. have acted in cooperation without any trouble, North Korea remains unable to make a move."

The 5th Air Force commander also plays the role of commanding the U.S. forces in Japan. The ASDF officer feared that a transfer of the 5th Air Force headquarters to Guam could lead to weakening channels to the U.S. Air Force.

However, the U.S. military's intention was to strengthen its base functions in Guam in the western Pacific region. According to analysis by a senior Defense Ministry official, the U.S. in this way aimed to constrain China's moves to make inroads into the Pacific region.

The integration plan was returned to a clean state in the end, as a result of joint efforts by senior ASDF officers and U.S. Air Force members knowledgeable about Japan to scrap the plan.

In February 2005, the governments of Japan and the U.S. put a list of "common strategic goals" into a document. It contained this passage: "We urge a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan Strait dispute through talks." But the draft as first presented by the U.S. Defense Department had used this strong expression: "We will never allow China to invade Taiwan." In response to Japan's strong request, the

TOKYO 00001447 006 OF 008

document also included a provision on Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea.

Japan, with North Korea in mind, is eager to strengthen the alliance, while the U.S. is eager to deploy troops to the western Pacific on a priority basis in order to prepare for China's possible advancement into the region. As it stands, differences in motives of Japan and the U.S. are gradually emerging.

Complications arising in negotiations with affected municipalities

Japan and the U.S. have agreed to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station to the Henoko district adjacent to Camp Schwab

in Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture. At 06:30 on May 21, Sakae Toyama, 67, director of the Peace Citizens Liaison Council, which is opposed to the government's Futenma relocation plan, told nine participants in the coastal blocking action group: "I hope you will use nonviolent means today." The members headed off in a rubber boat and a canoe into the ocean to the spot where ich the environment impact assessment by the Okinawa Bureau of Defense Policy is underway.

Futenma Air Station is a symbolic facility in Okinawa base issues. Twelve years have passed since the U.S. and Japanese governments agreed to return the facility. Okinawa Prefecture and Nago City had agreed on a plan to relocate the functions to waters off Henoko district. Under the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, however, the construction site was changed to the coastal area of Camp Schwab. Since then, relations between the central government and affected municipalities have become strained. The relocation plan has yet to be translated into action.

Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima, who won the election by promising to oppose the government plan, has called on the government to move the construction site for a pair of runways further into the sea as much as possible. Even so, the governor approved the start of the environmental impact assessment, premised on the implementation of the government plan. With no final agreement reached on the construction site, the assessment was started this March. The dismantlement of barracks on the compound of Camp Schwab was also started in May. Preparations for constructing the runways are steadily proceeding.

Toyama said: "The governor is expected to agree on the government plan in the end. But Okinawa does not need any new military bases."

(7) Stop cluster bombs - Voices of world and Japan (Conclusion): Interview with Hidenao Nakagawa, former secretary general of ruling Liberal Democratic Party: Prevent damage by adopting alternatives

MAINICHI (Page 7) (Full)
May 24, 2008

Interviewer Ken Uzuka

Weapons are tools used by soldiers against other soldiers. Weapons that kill and wound civilians indiscriminately deviate from the norms in terms of international law. A worst-case scenario is for unexploded bombs left after the end of a war causing harm to civilians, blowing off their arms and legs. In this sense, cluster munitions are called "the devil's weapon." Sometimes children suffer damage from duds when they play with them as if they were toys. The first priority challenge is to eliminate humanitarian damage as

TOKYO 00001447 007 OF 008

swiftly as possible. Old cluster bombs that have been scattered across the world and whose failure rates are high must be removed.

I appreciate the fact that Japan is a member of the Oslo Process. I deem it is necessary to change non-members' attitudes, for instance, the United States, Russia, and China. The ultimate goal is to eliminate all cluster munitions from the earth. We must do so, but if our discussion of whether to totally ban cluster bombs drags on, the damage to humans would simply expand. I think the important thing is to consider alternatives to minimize the human damage and improve the effectiveness of alternative weapons. In order to prepare such alternative munitions, my idea is to budget for them. A royal road to eliminate the harm to humanity would be to allow alternative weapons to some degree.

The old-model cluster munitions the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) have stockpiled so far should be scrapped. I believe a dispatch of the SDF abroad on missions to remove duds could obtain public understanding.

A draft treaty banning cluster munitions includes support for victims and cluster-bomb users' responsibility to work together to remove duds. I hope these things will be realized.

It may be a good idea to call on the Group of Eight (G-8) countries

at the upcoming G-8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit to work together to realize them.

Because I have been elected in Hiroshima, I strongly desire to eliminate nuclear weapons from the globe. There are neither winners nor losers in wars, only victims.

(8) U.S. closely watching Japan's preparedness as its ally

MAINICHI (Page 13) (Full)
May 26, 2008

Satoshi Morimoto, professor at Takushoku University

The U.S. has carried out the transformation of its military force on a global scale. In Asia, it focused on Japan and South Korea. It can be said that the major aim of the U.S. military transformation in Asia is to develop a China strategy. The U.S. thinks that it must not allow any Americans to shed blood in Asia again and that to that end, it is important to maintain a cooperative relationship with China.

However, when it comes to the moves of the Chinese military's advance into the Pacific region, it is another story. The U.S. attaches high importance to its maritime interests in the Asia-Pacific region. It is determined to fight if China advances into the region.

The U.S. studied what strategic system could deal with the Chinese Navy and Air Force in a most effective manner and it decided to transfer necessary functions to Guam, making it a strategic base. It also decided to deploy a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to Yokosuka, thereby attaching more importance to the western Pacific. The aim of the U.S. force realignment is to make changes in the U.S. forces in Japan so that they can meet the U.S. strategy.

If the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station to

TOKYO 00001447 008 OF 008

an alternative facility does not go smoothly, it would cause the structure of the realignment of the U.S. military presence in Japan itself to suffer a major setback. Moreover, the U.S. would harbor doubts about Japan's preparedness, resolve and ability to get things done as its ally. The U.S. does not think that it should defend Japan because of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. It is considering changing the quality of alliances, after determining to what extent its allies are prepared to maintain their alliance with the U.S. and to what degree they are willing to make contributions to the alliance. In other words, the U.S. is ready to end the alliance if its allies have no intention to maintain their end of the alliance with the U.S. Any state would plunge into crisis if it solely depends on what is written in a treaty. Its prime example is the Japan-USSR Nonaggression Pact.

There is a considerable gap between Japan and the U.S. in views of the security treaty and Status-of-Forces Agreement (SOFA). The U.S. sees the alliance from a global perspective, while Japan views it from legal and technical standpoints. It thinks from the perspective of giving consideration to its public. Japan is unable to possess nuclear weapons. It cannot possess massive military power, either. A military build-up is in progress among its neighbors. The time has supposedly come long before for it to discuss a basic national strategy of how to defend the nation over the next 50 and 100 years. However, political parties do not readily pursue strategic discussion, giving priority to maneuvering over party interests.

For the U.S., the Japan-U.S. alliance is part of its Asia-Pacific strategy. In essence, its aim is to forge an alliance with a country with which it can share maritime interests in the Pacific. Its ally does not have to be Japan. It may consider forging a multilateral alliance with countries with which it can share values, such as Australia, New Zealand or Singapore.

Satoshi Morimoto: Graduated from Defense Academy. In the present position at Takushoku University, after serving in the Air Self-Defense Force and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His works

include "The U.S. military transformation and U.S. Forces stationed in Japan." 67 years old.

SCHIEFFER